

Central Intelligence Agency



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## DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

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## Bleak Prospects for the Gemayel Government

Summary

The viability of Amin Gemayel's government depends upon his ability to satisfy the demands of Lebanon's confessional groups for a piece of the political action. The prospects for building a new political consensus are slim, however. The prolonged occupation has made confessional tensions worse, and it is probably too late for Gemayel to capitalize on the change in the domestic political balance brought about by Israel's sweep into Beirut last summer. As a result, the government of Lebanon is unlikely to be anything more than a government in Beirut, exercising tenuous authority over its territory and people. [ ]

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The central government can operate only in those areas that Syria, Israel, and their surrogates will permit. There is, consequently, a growing conviction among Lebanese factions that de facto partition is inevitable and that little is to be gained from cooperating with the central government. This mentality has been fueled by the anticipated redeployment of Israeli troops which would leave them in tighter control of more territory than is provided for in the Lebanese-Israeli withdrawal accord. Under these circumstances troop withdrawal is likely to contribute to renewed outbreaks of factional violence. [ ]

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Gemayel will not be able or willing to impose government authority on any confessional area by force. Instead he will

This memorandum was prepared by [ ] Arab-Israeli Division, Office of Near Eastern and South Asian Analysis. It was coordinated within the Directorate of Intelligence and with the Directorate of Operations. Information as of 14 July 1983 was used in preparation of this paper. Comments and queries are welcome and should be addressed to Chief, Arab-Israeli Division, [ ]

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seek to extend government control through back-room political deals that will enable the Lebanese Army to deploy into confessional areas without confronting local militias. [ ]

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Gemayel's effectiveness in winning over Shia, Sunni, and Druze leaders depends to a great extent on his ability to distance himself from Maronite and Phalange interests. He will also need to overcome his reluctance to deal with younger generation leaders who have come to prominence since the civil war and who may be more representative of their communities than traditional clan leaders. We believe Gemayel is losing confidence in his chances of ruling all of Lebanon, and he probably will now place greater emphasis in strengthening his claim to be Lebanon's preeminent Christian leader. [ ]

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In our judgment, US failure to achieve its aims in Lebanon--the withdrawal of foreign troops and the restoration of Lebanese sovereignty and territorial integrity--will not alter Gemayel's western orientation. He has no real alternative. The more serious repercussions of US failure to achieve its objectives lie beyond Lebanese borders. Other Arab states will question US ability to deliver on any new policy initiatives in the region. [ ]

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#### The Lebanese-Israeli Accord: Refocus on Domestic Affairs

The signing of the Lebanese-Israeli accord on 17 May represents a watershed in Lebanese domestic politics. During the course of the negotiations on foreign troop withdrawals, Gemayel enjoyed nearly unanimous backing from the country's various confessional groups. This broad-based support created an atmosphere for progress in forging a new domestic consensus, according to US Embassy reports, because groups seeking new power-sharing arrangements were willing to hold off on demands for the duration of the negotiating process. [ ]

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With the signing of the withdrawal agreement, this unifying factor disappeared. Lebanese factional leaders are anxious to get back to their real concern--the struggle for power inside Lebanon. [ ]

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#### Missed Opportunity

The Israeli invasion of Lebanon last summer broke the back of the PLO, weakened its Lebanese leftist allies, and restored the political power balance in favor of the Maronites. The prolonged occupation, however, has relieved confessional groups of the need to deal with each other politically. Leftists have had time to rearm, and Maronites, taking advantage of this renewed threat, have pressed their campaign to preserve Maronite

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hegemony in Lebanon. The window of opportunity may have passed for the central government to capitalize on the change in the domestic political balance brought about by Israel's sweep into Beirut last summer. Ironically, troop withdrawal at this stage is likely to contribute to renewed outbreaks of factional violence. [ ]

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### Extending Government Authority

The government of Lebanon holds undisputed political authority in barely 10 square kilometers of the entire country. Even within this area, however, it cannot maintain security. The Lebanese Army, backed by the Multi-National Force, provides general stability, but so many individuals in West Beirut have received paramilitary training and can easily acquire weapons that radical groups can carry out attacks against targets in the Beirut area at any time. What these armed groups cannot do is challenge overall government authority in the greater Beirut area. [ ]

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The army's ability to handle security duties beyond Beirut depends heavily on the political deals that Gemayel and Lebanese Army Commander Ibrahim Tannous can work out with government opponents and, to a lesser extent, on the popular perception that the army is backed by the Multi-National Force. Although the army is better armed and trained than the militias, we believe Gemayel does not want to use force to eliminate these paramilitary groups and risk splitting the army along confessional lines as occurred during the civil war in 1975-76. [ ]

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The government probably will have to be satisfied with some sort of compromise with Christian, Druze, and Shia militias that will allow these paramilitary organizations to retain their light weapons, provided no arms or uniforms are displayed in public. Such arrangements may restrict factional fighting and preserve army cohesion, but central government authority, in our view, will remain weak. We believe these deals will be difficult to make, let alone maintain, because Lebanon's confessional leaders are increasingly convinced that partition is inevitable and therefore see little to be gained by cooperating with the government. [ ]

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### Fear of the Phalange

Internal divisions in Lebanon have widened over the past few months, sparked by concerns among Muslims over Gemayel's domestic political direction. In the early days of his presidency Gemayel made overtures to all confessional groups and he promised to seek a new domestic formula that could include revision of the 1943 national pact or the Constitution itself. At heart, however, Gemayel remains a "Maronite firster," and his efforts to create at least the appearance of intercommunal consultation have had little effect. [ ]

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Non-Phalangists now accuse Gemayel of complicity in the Phalangization of the Lebanese Government and fear that a party, not a president, has come to power. They point to Amin's tendency to appoint Phalangists to many sensitive positions--for example, his appointment of a longtime Phalange security official, Zahi Bustani, to head the Surete Generale intelligence organization. The Phalange is a minority even within the Christian community. Other groups publicly have warned they will not accept political domination by a minority and that the consequence of a pro-Phalange policy will be new unrest and violence. [ ]

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The US Embassy points out that conversations with Phalange leaders suggest that fears of Phalange domination are not unfounded. The Phalange is doing its best to exert maximum influence over Lebanese politics. The general Phalange view is that the party has the right and obligation to prevent the return of Palestinian/leftist/Nasirite influence and that the best guarantee against this is as much Phalange control as possible. [ ]

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#### The Lebanese Forces: Still a Problem

In our judgment, the Phalange-dominated Lebanese Forces militia still represents the greatest domestic threat to stability. All political factions in Lebanon fear domination by the Lebanese Forces. The continued existence and activities of the militia are costing Gemayel more political support than any other single issue. [ ]

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Gemayel's moves against the militia last February that led to deployment of the army into East Beirut and the government takeover of Lebanese Forces' illegally-operated ports led many government opponents to believe Gemayel was prepared to bring the militia to heel. Since then the continuing stridency of the militia and Gemayel's failure to react has led many to suspect that the President is either in league with its extremist aims or cowed by them. [ ]

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Gemayel is in an untenable position. He would have to use the army to establish the authority over the Lebanese Forces that is essential if he is to reach accommodation with the country's non-Christian majority. At the same time Gemayel may be losing confidence in his chances of ruling all of Lebanon and thus may want to avoid alienating the militia whose backing he will need to strengthen his claim to be Lebanon's preeminent Christian leader. [ ]

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#### Partial Israeli Withdrawal

Israel has indicated it will redeploy its troops in Lebanon soon. One plan under consideration calls for a phased withdrawal, with Israeli troops initially pulling out of the area around Beirut. [ ] Gemayel and Lebanese

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Army Commander Tannous are trying to put such a move in the best light, arguing that this will allow the Lebanese Army to gradually take over territory from the Israelis, and at the same time set in motion a process that will encourage Syrian forces to pull out. In our judgment, a partial withdrawal by Israel will only encourage Syrian intransigence. [ ]

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If Israel consolidates its position in the south, probably in the vicinity of the Awwali River, it could spur renewed factional violence. Unless the army effectively can fill the vacuum as the Israelis withdraw, areas around Beirut could be engulfed by factional violence. Moreover, a move to the Awwali River would leave Israeli troops in tighter control of more territory than provided for in the withdrawal agreement with Lebanon. As Israeli security measures toughen in the South and limit opportunities for the local population to retaliate against its occupier, chances increase that the central government itself will become the direct target of dissident groups. [ ]

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We believe a phased Israeli withdrawal coupled with a "date certain" for the complete evacuation of Israeli forces from Lebanon, offers Gemayel the best chance for reaching accommodation with progressive and radical domestic factions. [ ]

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### Partition Mentality

If factional violence results from a partial Israeli withdrawal, a partition mentality could quickly take hold among confessional groups. In such an environment, Maronites would attempt to establish their military and political superiority in traditional Christian areas, abandoning the North and the Bekaa Valley to Damascus and whatever Syrian-sponsored "Government of Arab Lebanon" might be established there. At some point, the Maronites could be tempted to extend their area to two Christian enclaves under Syrian control--ex-President Franjiyah's area near Tripoli and the Greek Orthodox market town of Zahlah in the Bekaa Valley. [ ]

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Partial Israeli withdrawal, in our view, might prompt the Shia, to press a major campaign against Gemayel on behalf of their co-religionists in the South, who would represent the largest confessional group under Israeli occupation. Even the conservative Shia majority is likely to become more radical under these circumstances, perhaps opening the way for greater Iranian involvement in Lebanon's domestic politics. The Druze and other groups fearful of Maronite domination would again turn to Syria for support in fighting the Phalange and the Lebanese Forces militia. [ ]

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Under these circumstances, the performance of the Lebanese Army becomes crucial. If it collapses, the authority of the central government would be so diminished, it would become irrelevant in an outlaw domestic political process. If the army can hold together and keep factional fighting under control--a

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less likely prospect--confessional differences could be forced into the political arena. It is possible that a new consensus for governing Lebanon--or what is left of it--could be worked out. Without a reliable national armed forces, however, there is no reason to believe that any new arrangement will be more stable or enduring than in the past. [REDACTED]

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### Coping with New Circumstances

Gemayel's difficulties stem to some degree from the fact that he is a traditional politician caught in new circumstances. His attempts to restore Lebanon's conservative political balance by working deals with confessional elites and clan leaders, in our view, are less effective than in the past. Circumstances have radicalized younger generation Lebanese, yet Gemayel persists in dealing with traditional political bosses rather than with new leaders who have come to prominence since the civil war and who may be more representative of their communities. While Gemayel has made some efforts to keep lines of communication open to radical and progressive groups in Lebanon, in our estimation, he will continue to work within the traditional political framework familiar to him. [REDACTED]

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Gemayel has had some success with this approach--it was the support of traditional politicians in Parliament that enabled the government to win approval of the Lebanese-Israeli withdrawal accord. On domestic issues, however, the Lebanese civil war has accelerated the generational and class split among Muslims, sending more of their numbers into radical political organizations less willing to accept the political status quo. We believe the actual extension of government authority and the forging of a new political consensus will depend in part upon Gemayel's ability to draw the militants into a political dialogue. [REDACTED]

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Gemayel has had some success in reestablishing the alliance between the Maronites and the traditional Sunni Muslim elite, but according to the US Embassy, the Sunni community overall is becoming less supportive of the Gemayel government, viewing it as serving only Maronite interests. Gemayel's dealings with the Shia community also suffer from his preference for working with old-line Shia politicians, such as Speaker of the Lebanese Parliament Kemal al-Assad, than with more progressive leaders such as Nabih Berri, head of Amal, the largest Shia organization. [REDACTED]

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The Druze community, largely represented by the Progressive Socialist Party of Walid Junblatt, has long been at odds with the Maronites. Junblatt has told US Embassy officials that last year he hoped to reach an accommodation with Gemayel, but now there is a growing perception among the Druze that Gemayel no longer is interested in dealing with them on a political level. The Druze suspect that government "cooperation" may not go beyond settling the Druze-Lebanese Forces military conflict. [REDACTED]

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The Myth of Lebanon

Gemayel and other Lebanese officials are publicly optimistic over the ability of Lebanon's communities to work out a modus vivendi, if outside forces would only leave them alone. In fact, it is the long standing hatred and mutual distrust among confessional groups that led in the first place to what amounted to an open invitation by these communities for outside involvement in Lebanon's domestic affairs. Ironically, Syria and Israel were both invited to enter Lebanon by Maronite leaders.

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We believe Syrian, and now Israeli, involvement in Lebanon is a permanent fact. The government can only operate in those areas that Syria, Israel, and their surrogates will permit. Barring all out civil war, we believe the Gemayel government will survive and the myth of Lebanon persist for some time--even in the face of continuing factional violence. In reality, however, the government of Lebanon is unlikely to be anything more than the government in Beirut, exercising tenuous authority over its territory and people.

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Implications for the United States

The goals of the United States in Lebanon--withdrawal of foreign troops and the restoration of Lebanese sovereignty and territorial integrity--are being jeopardized as much by Christian militancy, which has exacerbated factional tensions, as by the stalemate in the withdrawal process. Confessional polarization has reached the point that the withdrawal of foreign forces could produce as many problems for the central government as continued occupation.

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In our judgment, failure to win foreign troop withdrawal from Lebanon will not alter Gemayel's western orientation. He has no real alternative to US support. While he will publicly oppose continued occupation of portions of his country, he is unlikely publicly to accuse the United States of reneging on its commitments to Lebanon. Instead he will continue to emphasize US "obligations" to Lebanon and to concentrate on the need to expand the Multi-National Force and rebuild the Lebanese Army.

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The Christian-dominated "Marounistan" that would result from de facto partition will need protection, putting greater demands on the US relationship, such as seeking special commitments to guarantee its economic and political survival.

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The more serious repercussions for US policy lie beyond Lebanon's borders. Other Arab states will perceive US failure to achieve its objectives in Lebanon as yet another example of US unwillingness to bring pressure to bear on Israel. They are also likely to be vocal in their criticism of what they see as the United States' inept approach on the withdrawal issue to the Syrians. Moreover, perceived US acquiescence to Israeli

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occupation of the South will frustrate other US policy initiatives in the region. Jordan and the PLO, for example, will be even more unlikely to put faith in US commitments on the future status of the West Bank. Lebanese officials frequently have stressed that Lebanon is the test of US credibility in the region and have warned that if the United States fails in Lebanon, it will fail throughout the Arab world. [REDACTED]

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SUBJECT: Bleak Prospects for the Gemayel Government

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